Till the bitter end

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Till the bitter end

by voxofthevoid

Summary

Will Graham wakes up in his bed, in his house in Wolf Trap, all but buried beneath a pile of canines.

He doesn't know whether to laugh or cry.

He screams.

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Mizumono Groundhog Day AU

Notes

Translation into Russian by Eleonora_De_Revero available here.

Based on this kinkmeme prompt. I picked Will. (And just so you know, he's in a rather weird headspace at the start of this.)

*Now edited. Fixed some embarrassing types and other errors.

See the end of the work for more notes

- Translation into 中文-普通话 國語 available: 直至尽头 by zivan
- Translation into Español available: Till the bitter end [Traducción] by babydoll8

His mind is blissfully blank for a moment after he wakes, and he can't quite see anything too strange with waking up on his own bed, save for how his are dogs curled up on the bed and *on* him in a rare violation of the 'no-dogs-on-the-bed' rule. Winston is sprawled half on his legs. Something about all of this feels familiar though.

The bliss doesn't last and Will *remembers.*

The phone call from Alana, F.B.I personnel at his home, the hectic cab ride to Baltimore, Alana's broken body, Abigail - *alive* and so, so scared, Hannibal staring at him with something akin to heartbreak in his eyes, the knife tearing through his unresisting flesh, the calm acceptance of his own death, Abigail struck down as his punishment, Hannibal leaving them to bleed out on the floor, the paramedics who came too late to save *her* life, blurred memories of white walls and nameless faces and then… darkness. Followed by *this*.

Will almost trips on the way as he bolts to the bathroom. He yanks off his shirt and freezes on the spot as the pale, unblemished skin of his abdomen comes into view. He hesitantly runs his fingertips over the area and recalls, with painful clarity, how the cool blade cut through him and the gentle, almost apologetic touches that followed in its wake. He closes his eyes, and suddenly, he's back in Baltimore, and Hannibal is the only thing holding him up as his blood paints both their bodies, whispering soft words into his ear that hurts so much more than any knife ever could.

I wanted to surprise you. And you… you wanted to surprise me.

Will's eyes flash open with a jolt and he falls to his knees on the tiled floor, barely feeling any pain at the harsh impact.

For a moment, he wonders if all of it had been just a horrific nightmare.

But he knows it's not.

Because he remembers waking exactly like this once before. He'd gone to sleep with the dogs, knowing full well that he may never see them gain. He'd woken with most of them lying half on top of him, Winston hogging his legs.

And besides… the rest of it feels far too real, their imprint on his mind too raw for all of it to have been only a dream.

Will is only slightly surprised when he checks the date and finds it to be 5: 30 am,
15th February 2013.

Last he remembers, it was nearly 8 pm on the same day and he was in Hannibal Lecter's house in Baltimore.

He is quite sure that there's no rational explanation for this situation.

So he wonders if this some kind of second chance.

Because if it is, he has no idea what to do with it.

He can't approach the Bureau, not if their intention is to arrest him. He could try to stop Jack from acting recklessly, but he doubts he'd succeed. He might be able to protect Alana if he can convince her not to go to Baltimore.

But even then, doesn't know what to do about Hannibal. In hindsight, it's all too obvious to him what Hannibal's offer that night- *last* night- had been. A last chance to come clean. And he'd not taken it.

He'd like to know, though, how Hannibal had known.

And he'd like to know what to do with *himself* now because he has no clue as to *what* he wants.

Will is just as torn now as he has been ever since he allowed himself to be lured into Hannibal's seductive darkness.

A part of him wants to just run away with the man and Abigail, embrace the place created for the three of them. A part of him is not sure if he'll ever truly fit into that place.

But he does know that any anger or hatred he might *(should)* have felt towards Hannibal is lost in the naked pain he remembers seeing in his eyes. Pain that may even have surpassed Will's own.

He's not sure how long he just sits on his bed, phone clutched in his hand, eyes shut tight, trying without success to sort through the conflicting mélange of his emotions. In the end, it's with a curious mixture of anticipation and resignation that he hits speed dial and calls Hannibal.

*

Will feels strangely calm as he waits for Hannibal to arrive, his emotions feeling faint and distant; not entirely *real.* He recognizes it as the calm before a storm.

Idly, he wonders what form the storm would take.

Only minutes seem to pass between his rather surreal conversation with Hannibal and the Bentley pulling up in front of his house. It almost feels like losing time.

He doesn't turn from where he's standing on the porch, staring absently at the dogs through the door. He doesn't so much as twitch when a door slams close or when soft footsteps approach him. He tries, in vain, to recall exactly what he'd told Hannibal. All he can really remember is his abrupt- *rude*- demand for Hannibal to come to Wolf Trap and the man's wary acquiescence. Was that all they said? Why did Hannibal really agree to come?

Will doesn't hear him call his name, but a light touch on his shoulder jerks him out of his reverie. He feels some of that eerie calm drain away. He takes a deep, grounding breath that feels completely inadequate for any of this, and turns, slowly, to face the only person he's sure to ever have loved.

The man who'd killed him.

Hannibal Lecter's burgundy eyes meet his and the calm *breaks*.

The dull thud of his body colliding with Hannibal's with the force of his embrace and the doctor's sharp gasp are drowned out by the great, shuddering sobs that wreck Will, all the anger, grief and frustration he's suppressed since his release from prison tearing through him, his knees giving away against the emotional assault.

Hannibal's arms close around him, their considerable strength the only thing holding Will up as he cries uncontrollably into his shoulders, hands clutching him desperately. Distantly, he's aware of Hannibal softly murmuring into his ear in a variety of unidentifiable languages and he latches on to that voice as best as he can through his hysteria. It's a while before his sobs quiet down enough for him to hear the actual words and even then, all he can really identify is his own name repeated over and over amidst a torrent of foreign syllables. It's strangely soothing.

It takes some more time for the tears to dry and for the shaking to subside, but Hannibal gently holds him through it all.

Will doesn't let him go even after he's back to normal, though it doesn't really escape him how this embrace parallels the way Hannibal had cradled him after stabbing him.

Perversely, he finds a measure of comfort in that.

He raises his head from where it's practically buried in the soft, expensive fabric of Hannibal's coat but makes no effort to back away. Even after everything he's gone through, this is comforting. Irrational and so *very* fucked up, but comforting.

His intimacy with Hannibal has never been in the physical sense except in those final moments. But he finds that he likes it despite- or perhaps because- of the disastrous circumstances that had accompanied it the last time.

"Will?" Hannibal's voice is soft, hesitant in a way Will has never heard before but his arms remain locked tight around Will. Once again, he ponders *why* Hannibal came here when he called, knowing about his deception.

"Sorry about your coat," is what comes out of his mouth but the other man's surprised and not at all humorous chuckle brings an equally grim smile to his lips.

Hannibal draws away, albeit reluctantly, and he takes a step back as well, really seeing the man for the first time since he came here. Outwardly, he looks as pristine as always, completely put together. But there are shadows in his eyes as he stares at Will that betray the conflict inside.

Will remembers all too easily precisely how he'd felt that day in Minnesota, when he realized that the man he'd come to regard as a true friend- someone he'd *trusted* -had betrayed him so completely. The knowledge that everything had been just a game to him and the devastation

that came along with it. The crippling grief that he'd buried beneath righteous rage. He remembers it all.

And he wonders, if that's how Hannibal feels now. The thought should be satisfying.

It isn't.

"I am sorry," he whispers, not flinching away from the smoldering intensity of Hannibal's gaze at the words. He does not fear the darkness in the other man; not when he's a part of it.

You're not alone, Will. I'm standing right beside you.

We're both alone without each other.

Truer words have never been spoken.

Hannibal regains control almost instantly and his tone is completely blank when he asks, "Sorry about what, William?"

Of course he wants Will to say the words out loud, a sort of slow torture for them both.

"You know what about," he says instead, "I don't know how you know, but you do. And I… I'm sorry."

I'm sorry I loved you just to destroy you.

And there it is, in Hannibal's eyes, that familiar blend of grief and rage. Only, it cuts Will just as deep, hurts him just as brutally.

Hannibal had then thought that he was helping Will by his actions, harsh and twisted as they were. Will knows all too well that he is only damning them both.

The doctor finally takes a step forward, the action effortlessly menacing. But he stands his ground, allows Hannibal to cross the little space between them until they are standing almost as close as they were before. Anticipation and resignation rises up in him once more, along with something *else.*

He knows this is foolish. Actually, to use a second chance (if that is what this is) to do little more than ensure his own annihilation is *beyond* foolish. But it doesn't feel like a *waste*. He wants closure, for them both. He owes it to Hannibal and himself.

And this, he hopes, will at least spare Abigail.

Hannibal opens his mouth to say something, but Will shocks them both by surging up to claim those lips with his own, sharing between them the taste of his tears. Hannibal stands frozen as he gently moves his mouth over the other's, wishing he'd done this a long time ago, instead of pushing away the desires he'd not wanted to accept.

He's about to pull away, to accept whatever fate awaits him- though he hopes he won't survive this time around- when Hannibal roughly pulls him against his body, their kiss

turning from bittersweet to heated with dizzying speed.

They bite and tear, with lips, tongue and teeth caught in a heady dance, holding on to each other with harsh, bruising grips as if afraid to let go. There is desperation beneath the barely restrained violence with which their teeth clash and tongues slide together as they try to devour each other; two broken men trying to fit their jagged pieces together and failing pitifully.

There are fresh tears on Will's face when they part and he doesn't know if the trembling in his limbs is because of despair, desire or both. He raises a shaking hand to Hannibal's face, cupping it gently, taking in how raw and wrecked the other man looks with the mask discarded.

"You need to go. You need to leave."

"Come with me. We can go together." There is a pleading note in his voice, much more pronounced now than it had been during their last supper. Will feels them pull at him, testing his resolve and tearing more holes in his heart.

But he smiles and shakes his head, his hand dropping limply back to his side. The pain in Hannibal's eyes batters at him, merging with his own to cut him deep.

"I'm not what you think I am." *Not entirely.* "What we have isn't sustainable, no matter how much we wish otherwise. I'm sorry."

I'm sorry you loved me only to end up having to destroy me.

He doesn't so much as flinch when the hands gripping his shoulders creep up to curl around his neck. Instead, he places his own over them to press them tighter, constricting his airflow ever so slightly.

This, he thinks, *is so much more intimate than a knife.*

But Hannibal doesn't squeeze any harder, staring with thinly veiled confusion at where both their hands are curved around Will's throat. His voice, when he speaks, is barely audible.

"Abigail is alive, Will. I have her at my house. She was meant to be a surprise for you."

"Your teacup came together," Will murmurs, not quite bothering to fake any surprise. It doesn't matter anymore. Still, he doesn't dwell on Abigail, not now. He can't. "Then you can go together. You can have your family."

"You are a part of that family, Will."

I wish I was.

"No, I'm not. You know I'm not. Maybe, in another life, I could've been. We could've been." Will leans in to murmur the words against Hannibal's cheek, all the while keeping the other's hands on his neck.

Even he is not all that sure why he's doing this; practically begging for death. It feels like the best solution, though. He knows he can never be the cold blooded killer Hannibal wants him to be. And he doesn't really want to live a life bereft of this man who somehow came to mean more to him than anything else. Perhaps he's a coward for seeking the easy way out. Or maybe he's just so *fucking tired* of all this.

"For what it's worth," he whispers in between pressing feather light kisses on Hannibal's face, "I love you. More than I should. More than I have any right to. Probably more than you deserve."

Hannibal's fingers tense on his neck and he pulls Will's head back so that they can look at each other properly. Will smiles. The pressure increases steadily as Hannibal leans forward, pain and grief and helpless rage simmering in his eyes.

He keeps on smiling.

"And I you." Hannibal breathes against his lips, before kissing him, and he can taste both their tears on his lips. The pressure on his throat keeps on rising.

Those lips don't leave his until the very end.

*

Will Graham wakes up in his bed, in his house in Wolf Trap, all but buried under a pile of canines.

He doesn't know whether to laugh or cry.

He screams.

*

He spends the day with his dogs, simply enjoying their company, trying to disregard how even they feel *tainted* now.

He doesn't call anyone, doesn't warn. He's not sure if there's any point. He attempts to find any- any – reason for this to be happening to him, but all he can manage is to replay the morbid memories of the last several hours over and over until his mind is numb.

He flat out ignores the desire to go see Hannibal.

When the light starts to leave the sky, he downs a glass of fiery whiskey and *waits.*

Alana calls.

This time, he does not hang up with a hasty goodbye. Instead, he lies, tells her Jack is there with him, that they're safe for now. When she warns him of their arrest warrants, he instructs her to get in touch with a lawyer.

For her sake, he hopes she listens.

He does not resist the men as they cuff him and lead him into a van, shooting him wary looks as they do so, and he concludes from their attitude that they'd seen what he did to Randall Tier. He pays them no mind, but as they head towards Quantico, he can't quite shake off the feeling that this- denying him a direct confrontation- is an even greater betrayal of Hannibal. The thought fills him with an odd mixture of glee and distress.

Then again, that hasn't yielded any permanent results the last two times, hence the new strategy.

His blank stare seems to unnerve Kade Purnell and puts her off the long, winded lecture she'd obviously prepared in advance for him. Alana arrives, alone, mere minutes after him, and he allows himself to feel a hot rush of relief. Not that it lasts long.

When the team that went to Jack's home returns empty-handed and she learns that the man wasn't with Will, she turns to him, eyes wide with dawning realization and outrage. He just gives her an empty smile, staring through her with listless eyes.

All of this is just a gamble.

Purnell is surprisingly receptive to Alana's suggestion to look for Jack at Hannibal's house.

Will is not even all that stung by the accusatory looks that she shoot him. He's used to those by now.

For some reason, he's not immediately thrown in a prison cell, though the two men that guard him as he sits in Jack's (now Purnell's) office make it quite clear that he is nothing but a prisoner. Alana is in there as well, though she's carefully not looking at him now. He's just surprised that she hasn't started yelling at him yet.

Time passes with extraordinary sluggishness for Will as he drifts, mind half rooted in reality and half lost inside of himself. They all wait and wait and wait.

Hours pass.

They find Jack, dead. Will doesn't know about any details. He doesn't even want to. He knows he is responsible for it, but guilt doesn't really set in.

Still just a gamble.

Jack's body is the only thing they find. No Abigail, so *he* probably took her with him. Probably. Hopefully.

If time doesn't reverse again (*oh, the irony*) then this outcome is as good as any. Though it feels so… bleak

But when darkness takes over his vision, he knows it's not because he fell asleep. And when wakes in his bed amidst his dogs, all he does is heave a resigned sigh.

It was just a gamble, after all.

There will probably be more in the future.

*

The internet, he can admit, is probably not the best place to search for information about his current predicament and not just because it is a hassle for him to gain access to it thanks to his remote location. It is also pretty much his only option. Sorting through the mix of fantasy and fiction, all he can gather is that he'll be free of *this*, only if he manages to trigger a particular event.

He supposes it's fair to assume that that 'event' is not *his* death.

Pity. That would have been the easiest and not just in one way.

And evidently, preventing Alana and Abigail's deaths aren't enough either.

So, then, he can try to save Jack.

Or… he can kill Hannibal.

The last option shouldn't *hurt as much as it did.*

He spends most of the day in a small park in Baltimore, just half an hour from Chandler Square. He tries to think about nothing, fails and ends up reliving certain special memories, and ignores the fact that a vast majority of them feature a cannibal psychiatrist.

Unconditional love forged from blood and death.

At half past seven, he climbs into his car and drives to Hannibal's house.

He drapes his coat over Alana's fallen form before going inside. And as does, he wonders if he is trying to *preserve* the situation in a twisted way. He doesn't draw his gun.

Though he knows to expect her, Abigail's terrified visage sends a sharp jolt through him, one he ignores along with her trembling words as he turns around, just in time to see Hannibal appear, silent as a ghost.

"What gave it away?" he asks, willing his voice not to falter as he braves the burgundy gaze. It's something he should've asked that day in Wolf Trap (which really is only today) but had neglected in the face of his tumultuous emotions. At first, he thinks Hannibal is not going to answer but he does, the words as faint as a feather.

"Yesterday, you carried Freddie Lounds' scent on you when you came to my office."

Will doesn't really have enough time to process the words when a large hand comes to rest against his cheek, impossibly tender just like he remembers. He smiles, a miserable twist of lips just as Hannibal's other arm moves.

Its foreknowledge rather than instinct that allows him to catch Hannibal's wrist before it can bury the knife in him. And it's a moment of surprise rather than raw strength that allows him

to sink the blade into Hannibal's chest, both their hands wrapped around the hilt.

Behind him, Abigail gives a shocked cry.

Hannibal's face shows only shock as Will twists the blade, once, before pulling it out and throwing it to the floor. The other man pitches forward into Will with a strangled gasp, the hand on his cheek shifting to dig into his shoulder desperately.

Will wraps his arms around Hannibal, holding him as tight as he can as his breaths turns rapid and ragged, hot blood drenching both of their bodies.

A reversal of roles.

"It's a terrible thing-" he murmurs into Hannibal's ear, adjusting his stance so that they'll both remain upright, "- to be betrayed by someone you trust above all others. Someone you love."

Hannibal's breaths turn to harsh, shallow pants and his fingers dig in like talons into flesh where his hands hold on to Will. He doesn't mind.

"What… makes you think… I love you?"

Will doesn't straight away reply as he gently lowers them both to the floor and shifts so that Hannibal is lying half on his lap, half on the floor. He avoids his gaze for the moment, not yet ready to see what it holds.

"I don't think, Hannibal. I *know."*

And I you.

Finally, he seeks out the red-brown eyes that he knows *so well*, and lets himself *see.*

There's pain in them and some vestiges of disbelief, but they're all eclipsed by *pride* and *affection.*

"Will…"

And suddenly, it's so much harder to breathe as the grim resolve that he held on to ever since he made this decision *crumbles.*

Will feels like he might be dying right alongside Hannibal.

He draws a hand against Hannibal's cheek, covers the profusely bleeding wound with his other in a desperate, futile attempt to curb the bleeding.

"I am so sorry." The words catch in his throat, choking him, as the possibility that *this* might be permanent hits him with devastating force.

Hannibal smiles, showing bloodied teeth, and whispers, "You are beautiful."

A warm hand covers his where it rests on Hannibal's cheek and he feels the pain in his chest increase tenfold as the dying man turns his head to press his mouth against Will's palm, his breath falling fast and harsh and hot on his skin.

"I am so sorry."

Against all odds, his eyes remain dry as he bends down to press his mouth against Hannibal's lips, stealing his last breath to keep it inside him, always.

*

Next time, when he wakes,with the images of a hysterical Abigail, Hannibal's lifeless body and the frenzied rush of cops and paramedics flooding his mind, all he can feel is pure, unadulterated relief that it *didn't work*.

He can't even bring himself to feel guilty for feeling relieved.

*

Several tries later, Will is dangerously close to losing hope.

Nothing he has done seems to have any effect whatsoever on these infernal loops he's stuck in. No matter how many times he dies, no matter how many times he kills Hannibal *(the two feel eerily similar)*, he still wakes up in Wolf Trap at sharp 5:30 am.

And he just wants it to *end*. Even he's not masochistic enough to want to live the worst day of his life over and over and over, seeing everything fall apart in increasingly devastating ways, trying in vain to somehow make it all better. He can save Alana, save Abigail, save Jack, all to no avail. He can let them all die or let Hannibal escape unharmed and it's still the same. He's lost count of how many times he has allowed Hannibal to kill him, only to wake up in his bed mere moments later. He can remember the thick blood gushing over his hands and the wistful adoration in Hannibal's eyes every time Will takes his life.

It's morbidly fascinating, the stark difference in Hannibal's emotions in those two situations. He is sad and furious every time he hurts or kills Will, but all of that changes into a breathtaking mixture of pride, admiration *(and something strange like love)* when Will kills *him*.

Fascinating, but no less frustrating for it.

But even as Will's desperation rises, there's a part of him- a part he does his best to bury deep, deep inside- that is *happy* none of his efforts are bearing fruit. That's the part that had wanted the life Hannibal envisioned for them with an intensity that probably rivaled the other man's. And it still hopes for a future, a life *with* Hannibal that does not involve one or both of them dead or incarcerated.

A futile wish.

But it's enough to make him wonder what would have happened if he'd chosen Hannibal when he had the chance. If he'd just said *Yes* to his final offer. Would he still have ended up

reliving the same day like this?

He knows though, that it still wouldn't have ended well, for either of them and certainly not for Abigail. They'd break the girl, or rather, the fear-filled creature she'd become, between the two of them. And one day, they'd break each other as well, tear themselves apart when love and admiration turned to resentment and disappointment.

It would be a pity to poison their relationship like that.

Or so he tells himself.

But, it's his ever increasing desperation that sets his resolve to go down another doomed path, despite the destruction that it promises even if it is to last.

Desperation and that tiny sliver of hope left inside of him that cold reason and grim certainty has not yet killed.

*

If Hannibal is surprised at seeing Will on his doorstep at 7:00 am in the morning with no particular reason- a phenomenon that was all too common only *prior* to his incarceration- he doesn't show it. He simply steps aside to grant him entrance. Something tells Will that Hannibal has slept very little- if at all- the previous night.

They don't speak at all as Will makes his way into the sitting room, Hannibal trailing behind. It's all terribly rude, but he has always been an exception to Hannibal's 'Eat the Rude' policy, even at the very beginning of their strange relationship, when Hannibal had been nothing but an unconventional, persistent psychiatrist to him. But despite the silence, there's an almost palpable tension between the two of them and Will has to fight off the utterly ridiculous urge to laugh at the absurdity of all this, at all the layers of deception.

He wonders idly if Hannibal's *curiosity* at this moment overweighs the desire to punish Will for his lies or if it's merely his phenomenal self-discipline that's keeping the doctor's face stoic even now. He also wonders if the lingering warmth in his eyes as he looks at Will is as outside of his control as Will's own irrational affection (*love*) is.

He settles on the large, plush couch and daringly pats the space beside him, a silent request for Hannibal to join him. He does.

"You're early, Will." It's the first words either of them has spoken and Will is proud of himself for being able to detect the faint tremor in the other's voice, the only sign of how much this sudden, unexpected and unwise visit is affecting him.

"Does your proposal still stand?" is what he offers in return. He doesn't need to specify precisely what he's referring to. It's another gamble- the last of many- and had he been anyone but himself, he'd have missed the way Hannibal's breathing picks up at the words and the way his entire body just freezes up for a long, glorious moment.

You want this, want me, so much. You're so certain that this is what's best for all three of us, that this space you've created for us will be the paradise you imagine it to be.

A part of Will tries to imagine how Hannibal would feel when it all inevitably fell apart. Would he mourn or would he regret?

Another part of him wants to cling to that conviction and make it his own, just in case fate finally decides to relent and release him from this sweet torture.

"Why the sudden change of heart?" Will does not turn to meet the sharp eyes he can feel boring into him, but he doesn't need to look at him to know that Hannibal is ruthlessly crushing the inklings of hope his words have aroused under the cold certainty that this is just another act on Will's part. "I was under the impression that you needed Jack to know the truth."

Will smiles, short and bitter, and finally turns to face Hannibal, sees his own pain reflected in the faraway depths of ruby red orbs.

"We're just alike. This gives you the capacity to deceive me, and be deceived by me. Your words. Do you remember? Of course you do." He savors the look in Hannibal's eyes as Will takes his face between his hands and roughly pulls him closer until he's just a kiss away. "But the thing is, once we see through that deception, it becomes a useless tool. Loses the strength required to maintain the illusion and still remain immune to such intense scrutiny. Wouldn't you agree, Hannibal?"

The moment Hannibal sheds his mask is marked by the way his hands come up to grip Will by his shoulders, the touch deceptively light despite the way the very air around them turns heavy with the weight of his emotions. It will never cease to *hurt* him how Hannibal always touched him with such tenderness, as if Will was the most precious thing in the world, even in those moments when one of them was mournfully tearing the other apart. It hurts and he thinks it's the most *beautiful* sensation he's ever felt.

"I'm asking again, does your offer still stand? Because this is my choice, late as it may be. But will you accept or would you rather just kill me?"

"I need to know why, Will." And there it is, that flash of hope, present in the way his eyes turn pleading and how his voice sounds almost broken to Will's too-perceptive senses.

Hope.

"Nothing makes one more vulnerable than loneliness." It's a struggle for Will to say the next words, they threaten to suffocate him with how desperately true they are, but he forces them out anyway and lets his eyes show the terror he feels at them. "I *need* you."

If there's one thing these loops have taught him, it's that.

And it terrifies him.

Because he knows that they are destined for destruction.

He does not resist when Hannibal leans forward slowly to cautiously press his lips to Will's, eyes wide open and watching him carefully. This is a first for him, but not for Will. He is all too familiar with the taste and feel of Hannibal's lips; an indulgence he's allowed himself in most of his recent, varying encounters with the man.

But there's something so good about being able to kiss Hannibal when it's not succeeding or preceding one of their deaths.

They part soon- far too soon- but Will only tightens his hold on Hannibal when he makes to pull away, keeping him right there. Their foreheads rest against each other as they stay like that, drinking in the very existence of each other.

I need you. And I am so scared.

Seconds or years could've passed by the time Hannibal finally moves, gently removing Will's own arm from his face and kissing his knuckles with something that borders on reverence before rising to his feet in one, smooth movement.

"Stay. There's something I must show you."

He stays, knowing full well what Hannibal is about to show him.

And he knows that he has made his decision.

When he returns, one-eared Abigail in tow, Will makes sure that he shows the appropriate amount of shock, relief and delight that is expected of him.

Hope.

*

Despite the fact that he's known the truth about Abigail's continued existence for a while now- well, it's been just the same day, but his mind does age- he finds it hard to let her out of his sight as Hannibal quickly and efficiently prepares for their departure. He is not entirely sure what to make of the fact that Hannibal has a suitcase prepared with clothes that fit Will.

She feels so small in his arms, and he wonders if the raw terror in her doe-like eyes that her smiles can't quite hide will ever fade.

Abigail is so fractured that it would be all too easy to just break her. But she could be fixed as well, with time and effort.

"Are we really going away?" she asks him, the words partially muffled with the way her face is buried in his shoulder, "Are you really coming?"

He smiles, gentle, as she lifts her face to look at him, because he doesn't know what else to do.

"Yes, Abigail."

For now.

It is a little past three in the afternoon when they leave the house. He's only mildly alarmed when Hannibal drives them to a small, semi-isolated house in Gaithersburg, Maryland and informs them that they'll need to stay there for a few hours as their flight is in the morning.

"This property is registered under an alias. No one will find us here."

"I assume you have a car less conspicuous than a Bentley?" Will's query is answered with a fond smile. He smiles back.

Hope.

Abigail quickly retires to one of the bedrooms in the house, leaving Will and Hannibal in the living room with only their luggage for company. They sit on the couch like silent sentinels; the only sounds that of their breathing. After a while, he leans into the solid body beside him, basking in the comfort that he's almost always derived from Hannibal's presence.

"This doesn't feel entirely real. I'm afraid that if I blink, all of this will disappear."

It's strange to hear such words, so uncharacteristically vulnerable, from Hannibal, stranger still to know that they are achingly true.

And so very ironic because *Will* may have to suffer the exact same fate.

"This is real." He says, taking Hannibal's hand in his and entwining their fingers. He wills his voice not to sound as bleak as he feels, tries to shove away all the fear and confusion that he feels at the uncertainty of this situation. "We're here and we're real."

For now.

It shouldn't be surprising how Hannibal falls asleep a while later, given how long he must have gone without rest, but Will can't help but marvel at it anyway because he knows Hannibal doesn't trust him fully just yet.

Then again, he's pretty sure that the man will wake if he makes a move to even leave the couch.

Will counts the minutes as they pass, alternating between staring at their joined hands, which fit together so perfectly that it sends a pang through his chest, and Hannibal's sleeping visage, which somehow makes him seem younger. He knows that, despite all his fears and doubts, he will cherish this moment till the end of his days.

The clock strikes twelve.

He doesn't blink.

But everything disappears nonetheless.

So much for hope.

*

Will is not entirely sure what makes him do it; maybe it's the infuriating look of utter calm on Hannibal's face as he opens the door, or the fact that Will just doesn't know what to do anymore, or the memories of sitting on a sofa with Hannibal's hand in his and the knowledge that the man before him will never remember *any* of it…

In hindsight, assaulting Hannibal the moment the door closed behind them wasn't the most thought out decision in his life. But he can't quite bring himself to regret it, not with how Hannibal's lips part so readily for him and how *right* his body feels pressed against Will's.

Despite all the grief, pain and fury Will pours into the kiss, there is an underlying reverence to it that Hannibal returns with equal fervor. He pulls back when his lungs burn with the lack of air, but doesn't release Hannibal, keeping the doctor pinned to the wall with his body, his hands tangled in pale blond hair.

"Will, what-"

He cuts him off with another kiss, wanting to stop *thinking* and just *feel* for this once. He can feel his desperate desire mirrored in the way Hannibal paws at him, all decorum forgotten, as they both struggle to hold on to something they know they'll lose. Their reasons may be different, but in that moment, they're just two men trying to escape reality for just a little while.

And so Hannibal doesn't fight, doesn't even question Will.

He just accepts. And he gives.

Later, as they lie on the living room floor, still half clothed and completely spent, Will thinks that he didn't intend for it to go *this* far and is genuinely shocked that Hannibal let it happen at all.

He's not complaining.

Neither is Hannibal, it seems.

But then, reality reasserts her grip on them both.

"What is this?" Hannibal's asks, his first words- unless mumbled gasps of Will's name count- since his earlier aborted attempt in the foyer. His hand is curved around the back of Will's neck and he is all too aware of how easy it would be for Hannibal to kill him… so all this can start again.

That thought effectively kills the afterglow.

"This is desperation," Will answers truthfully, pressing the words into the slick skin of Hannibal's bare chest, "A clutch at something we both know we cannot have."

"Why not?" The hand on his neck tightens involuntarily. He pays it no mind.

He doesn't answer Hannibal's question with his usual half-truths. What's is the point? Will doesn't know what he's doing here, but he has no interest in re-enacting a slightly different version of a well-worn script.

He decides to give him the truth instead.

"You know, I was just confused at first. But now… now I'm hopelessly *lost.*" Will rears up from where he's splayed half on top of Hannibal to lean over the other, staring into his eyes. "I know your trust in me is pretty much nonexistent at the moment, but if I were to tell you something utterly absurd, would you believe me?"

For a torturously long time, Hannibal is silent, simply watching him with his piercing, keen gaze. Whatever he was searching for in Will, he must have found it because his answer feels more like a promise.

"Yes."

Will smiles.

*

The words pour out of him in a graceless rush, fuelled by emotions long suppressed, and it is a while before Will can compose himself well enough to relay it all to the other with something resembling coherency. Hannibal takes it all in, silently, his face an inscrutable mask and he is irrationally grateful for that silence, that calmness.

It's grounding.

"It doesn't matter what I do," Will hates the tremor that creeps into his voice, but ploughs on anyway, "-the end is always the same. I can kill you, let you go, make you kill me, save the others, let them all die… none of it matters. I still *wake up."*

He only realizes he's panting, trembling when a warm hand curls around his bicep and he is pulled against Hannibal, both of his arms wrapping around Will in a gesture that is both protective and possessive. It is astounding how fast he calms down, but his heart remains heavy even as he holds on to Hannibal with all his might.

"You have tried everything?" There's not even a hint of disbelief in Hannibal's voice, but he knows better than to take him at face value.

"Do you believe me? Because I am fully aware that I sound like a raving lunatic."

"I know you're not lying. Not this time." Will smiles at the faint accusatory note in his voice, but doesn't comment."Then there's the matter of Abigail. And… the man I knew till yesterday would not be here, like this." Hannibal presses a soft kiss beneath is ear to emphasize his point and Will relaxes a bit more, some of the tension deserting his frame."

"I'm still surprised *you* let this happen. I've had… a few weeks to get to this point, in a way. Unlike you."

“Desperation, Will, as you so succinctly put it. That and the fact that, despite everything, you still manage to cloud my judgment.”

They’re both quiet for a while as he savors the pleasure those words, unexpected and absolutely sincere, evokes in him. When he does speak again, it is to answer Hannibal’s earlier question.

“I have tried everything I can think of. Last time, I tried to leave with you and Abigail. I showed up here, in the morning, barged into your house like I owned the place and asked you whether your offer from yesterday was still valid.” A laugh, pained, trickles past his lips and Will presses himself tight against Hannibal, wanting to just burrow inside the man. “It was surprisingly easy to convince you, even though I didn’t tell you anything about my unique predicament. You took us to a nice little house in Gaithersburg. Abigail went to bed early because you said our flight was in the morning. We sat on the couch, and I… I held your hand. It felt nice, comforting. You told me you were afraid that you’d blink and everything would just disappear. I said that it wouldn’t, that it was all real. And I was so terrified that I’ll blink and it will all disappear like before. You fell asleep after that. You were tired, I think. Do you know that you look so *peaceful* when you sleep? And I, uh, I didn’t blink or close my eyes or *anything*, but it all disappeared anyway. And then I woke up.”

His voice breaks on the last word and he’s all too aware of the tears staining his cheeks and the way Hannibal has gone absolutely still against him.

“Will…” his name is just a pained whisper on the other’s tongue and Will turns, harsh and quick, until he’s facing Hannibal once again, both of them curled awkwardly on the sofa.

One of his hands rakes through the fine hair on Hannibal’s scalp, the other coming up to cup his cheek, their grip harsh with the force of his rampaging emotions.

“Do you have any idea what it’s like to keep seeing it all go to hell over and over? To keep losing you again and again, one way or the other, how *helpless* I feel? Every time I kill you, I feel like I’m ripping out my own soul. The look in your eyes from the times you've hurt me is *haunting* me. I can’t keep doing this, Hannibal. I *can’t.”*

Hannibal’s mouth is soft and moist as it steals the breath from Will, a slow, unhurried thing meant to comfort rather than arouse. It works, somewhat, as Will feels the hysteria hovering just at the edges of his psyche recede as he momentarily loses himself to the wet slide of their lips and tongues.

They part with a quiet sigh that’s lost between them and Will opens his eyes to see Hannibal watch him with an agonizingly familiar gentleness in his eyes.

“I am so sorry, Will.” From anyone else, they would be just empty words, but with Hannibal, they are anything but. Though Will has the feeling that he’s not entirely sure what he is apologizing for. “I am so very sorry.”

“Yeah, so am I.” he replies, smiles though it turns into a pained grimace about halfway through. A sudden desire flares up and the words tumble past his lips before he can think better of them. “Would you take me somewhere?”

He expects Hannibal to frown and question him, to at least be confused by the abrupt demand, but he simply nods, brushing a stray curl away from Will's face.

"Where would you like to go?"

"Somewhere. Anywhere. With you. Just for a little while, for some… peace."

A brief respite.

*

Hannibal takes him to Wolf Trap.

Not his house, of course. That would be an exercise in futility as the place would be raided soon enough.

He takes him to a place well away from Will's home; to an area far removed from any traces of civilization. Will is inappropriately amused when the other man parks the car out of sight among a cluster of trees with disturbing efficiency before leading him to a small clearing, hidden from view by the large trees surrounding it.

Will doesn't ask him how he came by this place. He has a pretty good idea anyway.

"While you were incarcerated, I used to visit your house." Hannibal tells him, surprising Will and rousing his curiosity. "I never once ventured inside. I didn't think you'd appreciate it. But I still felt your *essence* while I was there. It helped me cope with the loss of your company. On some of those days, I'd come here as well, to think. Mostly of you."

"Oddly sentimental." Is the only response he gives, eagerly drinking in the image Hannibal just painted with this unexpected confession.

"You have induced quite a number of odd behaviors in me, my dear Will. I can't quite bring myself to mind as much as I should."

"You changed me. Only fair that I change you."

It's cold out there but neither of them pay much mind to it as they seat themselves on a thick blanket- Hannibal is nothing if not thorough- laid over the sodden ground. Will almost instantly moves from his initial position beside Hannibal to crawl over the man and settle between his spread legs, leaning back comfortably against his torso. Hannibal's arms readily twine around him and he rests his chin on Will's shoulder, pressing them close.

Oddly romantic.

He spares a moment to consider whether Abigail should be there with them, but dismisses the thought just as fast. As much as he adores her, this is for the two of them alone. Besides, Hannibal had assured him that Jack or whoever else may come calling would not find her in his house.

“I can hear you thinking, Will.” Hannibal’s voice is low and soothing and Will wants to wrap it around him like a blanket and never leave the comfort it provides.

Oddly sentimental, indeed.

“If I’d said yes that night- which is yesterday for you- what would you have done?”

Hannibal doesn’t answer immediately, choosing instead to press his face into Will’s neck and breathe him in, the chest behind him expanding with the motion. And when he does speak, there is a wistful note to his tone that resonates deep within Will's soul.

“I would have forgiven you. And I would have given you Abigail. We’d have gone to Wolf Trap, fed the dogs, you’d have written a letter for Alana. Then, we’d have left. For a new life, for that place in the world for just us three.” Hannibal presses his lips to the nape of his neck, his breath ghosting over the sensitive skin there as he draws back. “I realize now, that it was simply a pipe dream.”

Will doesn’t correct him or reassure him, but he does close his eyes against the way his heart aches at the longing radiating from Hannibal, his own mingling with it.

“But a beautiful dream nonetheless. Tell me the rest of it.”

“Will, I don’t-”

“Please.”

Hannibal relents, draws Will closer to him, and begins.

“I’ll take you to Paris. France is very special to me, and I want to share that with you. I recently bought a house there. It’s a nice place, secluded and airy, with a large backyard for all the strays that you will eventually, inevitably collect. We’ll start a new life there, with new identities and none of the strife and bloodshed from our past will follow us there. Abigail can go to college, as she’s always wanted, without her father’s crimes casting a shadow over her. We’ll both find jobs; it should be easy enough given our skill sets. I’ll resume my hobbies, but I will not pressure either you or Abigail to join in. I’ll hope though, that *you* will do so one day.” Hannibal pauses to chuckle humorlessly, before continuing, “But you won’t.”

“I might.” Will interrupts, the words nothing but a mere whisper, a confession. “If their offense was great enough to warrant it, I might. We’d work well together, don’t you think?”

Doing bad things to bad people make you feel good.

“Yes.” Hannibal’s answer sounds rough and choked, but he recovers quickly and resumes his narration, though there is an underlying urgency to it that wasn’t there before. “But *none of it* would matter, Will. The killing, the lies, not even Abigail… I’ll be content to just have *you*. By my side. And I will try and try to make it up to you, to apologize for all the wrong I’ve inflicted on you-”

“- Not because you feel guilty,” It's easy as breathing to pick up where Hannibal left off, the words flowing effortlessly from Will, “but because you want to appease me. To win me over,

properly this time around. You'll compromise and I will too. It won't be easy. We'll fight. A lot. We may even be tempted to kill each other… but we won't."

"It would be far too much like suicide." There is naked adoration in Hannibal's voice as he laces their fingers together, his grip hard and desperate. "So we'll adjust, eventually. And one day, it *will* become easy. Abigail will help. She'll outgrow her fear and bloom into a wonderful young woman. And you will be as overprotective as ever. But we'll have to let her go one day, let her spread her wings and fly. And then, it'll be just us two. We'll leave France, go to Italy perhaps. I've always wanted to show you Florence. It's a beautiful place. We'll buy a villa, one that we both like, and settle again. Just us two."

"We'll be happy." Will's voice breaks on the last word and his throat feels tight, but he keeps on talking anyway, enamored by this future-that-will-never-be that plays out in his mind, his overabundant imagination turning it into a glorious reality behind his closed lids. "It won't be perfect, or even normal. But we'll be happy. Maybe we'll even be like one of those old, married couples, with our own version of banter and this… *connection*. We'll be happy, and together."

"Yes. We would be. Maybe we'll get to grow old together... maybe even die together. I would like that, to die by your side."

"Yeah," he whispers, not entirely trusting his voice with the way those words affect him. "So would I."

We are destined for destruction.

Will turns his head to press their lips together in a wet, salty kiss, their silent tears merging as they kiss, sweet and sad and forlorn.

But by the God that I do not believe in, I wish I could have a life with you.

They don't speak again for the remainder of their time together, both lost in each other and the unattainable dream they spun with their words.

Will lays his head on Hannibal's chest and listens to the soft, steady beats of his heart, his earlier words tugging at him tirelessly.

...to die by your side...

*

This time, when Will wakes and wades his way through a mass of dogs, it is with the grim knowledge of what he has to do to end this.

*

It is so terribly tempting to try and explore the recently discovered dimension to his relationship with Hannibal some more, to not end it all just yet, to steal a few more days. It's possible, he knows. And it would be easy enough despite of the fact that Hannibal would not- could not- retain any memories of that inexplicable tenderness they shared unlike Will who

remembers everything with perfect, painful clarity. But it would be so, *so* easy to coax it out of Hannibal with the right words and right actions.

But even as the idea forms and lingers, Will knows that he will never do it.

It feels like cheating, and while he has no qualms about the concept itself, he has no desire to sully his memories with anything less raw, less genuine that those stolen moments with Hannibal.

He regrets though, that the other will never remember any of it. It doesn't seem fair, somehow, that only Will gets to keep those wonderful moments.

Since when is life fair?

It's ironic though, how hesitant he is now when all he wanted before was for all this to end.

Of course, he has no guarantee that what he has in mind will end this, but he has a strong, profound feeling that it *will* work.

It's not simply *hope* this time around, but a sort of dismal, daunting certainty.

It fills him with both relief and misery.

Try as he might, he finds himself unable to spend the day in Wolf Trap, far too restless to let even the dogs soothe him. Understandable, given the circumstances. A bitter smile twists his mouth as he writes a letter for Alana, nothing dramatic or sentimental, just a quick something requesting her to care for his dogs and apologizing for any pain he may cause her. He doesn't mention how the decision to preserve her life had been a matter of mild internal debate. In the end, the precious remnants of his affection for the woman had overridden his morbid desire to leave all of their lives to the fickle whims of fate.

All lives except his and Hannibal's. Will is sure that he has every right to take those into his hands.

He's not going to bother with Jack though. All the respect and admiration he once held for the man was washed away as the part of Will that has always resented the man for all the damage he's wrought rose to the surface with each despondent loop, until his concern for the life of Jack Crawford became non-existent.

As for Abigail… he can only hope that she can survive the world and everything that it will throw at her; that she will find the strength to move on after everything she's endured at the hands of her father and then, Will and Hannibal.

I am playing God here, all of my own accord. Hannibal would be proud.

That thought is more amusing than it has any right to be. Or maybe he is just that emotionally fucked at the moment.

Will spends the day in Baltimore, driving around aimlessly, never straying too far from Hannibal's neighborhood. The wait is torturous, but exquisite in its own way.

A much anticipated, much dreaded countdown towards utter *chaos*.

When Alana calls, he answers. When she inquires about Jack, he feeds the very same lies from before and wonders, for a brief second, how she would react in the aftermath. Would she torture herself with needless quilt? Probably.

He waits for an appropriate amount of time before heading over to Hannibal's home.

He peels off his soaked jacket and leaves it on the doorstep before venturing inside, utterly exposed and vulnerable, unwilling to hide behind a gun again. His firearm remains in the relative safety of Wolf Trap.

Will knows he's early- earlier than he has ever been before- and is aware that that he will probably not be treated to any of the sequence of events that he is familiar with. And yet, the sight that greets him effectively roots him to the spot until all he can do is watch, transfixed.

He has the dubious privilege of knowing Hannibal Lecter better than anyone else alive. He is all too aware of the ferocious beast inside the man that hides behind a perfectly crafted mirage of wealth and civility. But still, it is another thing entirely to watch him *unleashed* in such a manner.

Hannibal is all coiled strength and fearsome grace as he repeatedly throws himself against the pantry door, oblivious to Will's sudden presence.

Beautiful.

And he is. So very beautiful. Glorious. Breathtaking.

Will remains silent and still, content to just *watch* Hannibal in all his glory, a sight he has not had the pleasure of witnessing until now. It was always the man, never the monster, that killed Will or perished in his hands.

It's only halfway through his third tackle that his eyes fall on Will, and widens. The pantry with Jack inside is abandoned as Hannibal turns on him, his wildness giving way to something more human as he advances on Will, still every inch a predator.

"Hannibal."

He's amused when Hannibal casually discards the long knives in his hands on the way and wonders if the action is meant to put Will at ease or if Hannibal has something less lethal but just as damaging in mind for him. Both, probably.

Hannibal comes to a halt only when he's right in front of Will, nearly touching him.

"Will."

He unabashedly leans into the hand that strokes across his cheek to curve around the back of his head and pretends not to notice the small linoleum knife that Hannibal discreetly draws from the pocket of his pants. Instead he keeps his eyes on Hannibal, staring into the glittering red gaze for what he hopes and fears will be the last time.

“I’m surprised you came here unarmed.” Hannibal tells him.

Will gives no response other than to part his lips in a soft cry when the blade plunges deep into him, one hand flying up to grip Hannibal’s shoulder. The wound, he knows, is meant to *hurt,* not kill. It’s punishment, not death.

Or at least that’s what Hannibal intends it to be.

The two of us always did have a tendency to fuck up each other’s plans.

Will smiles, warm and genuine, at Hannibal as he curls his free hand over the fingers wrapped around the handle of the knife inside him and pushes it in *deep* and *up*, sending a fiery jolt of blinding pain through his body. Shock flares in Hannibal’s eyes, followed by confusion and then, frantic distress. He hastily pulls out the knife, throwing it away without a second glance.

“Why?” he rasps, voice barely recognizable with emotion, and throws his arm around Will to keep him upright as the other one applies pressure on his profusely bleeding stomach to try and staunch the flow.

Will’s answer is to press his lips to Hannibal’s in a desperate, uncoordinated kiss that momentarily stuns the man.

He doesn’t notice how Will’s shaky hands retrieve the hunting knife he stashed in his back pocket before leaving his house.

He pulls back, not by much, but just enough that he can murmur his next words against Hannibal’s lips.

“Because this is how it has to be.”

Mutually assured destruction.

And he uses the last of his rapidly waning strength to bury the dagger deep inside Hannibal’s chest, too close to the heart to be anything but fatal, but not enough to grant him a quick death. He jerks it out of him just as fast.

Neither of their deaths will be fast or easy. They will both suffer, together.

Fitting.

Wills knees give out just as Hannibal falls backward and the two of them collapse on the floor in a messy heap, their arms still half around each other.

“I didn’t… come here unarmed.” Will whispers, his face pressed against Hannibal’s cheek, his voice breathless with the effort of talking. “I just thought… you’d appreciate… a knife… no guns. More…intimate.”

Hannibal tries to chuckle, though the sound turns into a wet, bloody cough and he curls his arm a little closer around Will where they both lie bleeding out in the hallway.

“Remarkable boy. My Will…”

Will closes his eyes, pushes himself as close as he can to Hannibal, and remembers,

A strange first meeting in Jack’s office.

A friend who finally made him feel less alone.

Disbelief at his betrayal, and heartache.

A cruel game that became so much more.

The cold realization that he was in love with a monster.

Being cradled in tender arms as he bled out between them.

Kisses that taste like blood and tears, fear and despair.

A quiet evening spent in simple intimacy.

Making love with frenzied desperation on the cool, hard floor.

Hours spent in a small field voicing treasured dreams and forlorn desires.

And a life that was never lived.

Hannibal.

*

Will Graham does not wake up again.

Neither does Hannibal Lecter.

The End

End Notes

I am so sorry. I guess it was a matter of time before all the angst I am so very fond of reading and sobbing over crept into my writing. I would like to say that the ending wrote itself… but to be honest, I wrote this entire fic with this particular climax in mind. If felt so right. Sorry.

The date is more or less random. (Does it rain in Baltimore in February? ~~But all those episodes showed so much snow…~~) If you have any more accurate suggestions, tell me.

Works inspired by this one

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